



Arts Forum 164

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# ARTS FORUM CORADDI

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## ART WORK

Cover: Woodcut by Ina von McInnis	
Line Drawing by Emmy Mills	7
Watercolor by Betty Birke	10
Woodcut by Jean Ellen Jones	14
Pen Sketch by Lealan Nunn	20
Woodcut by Marian Buchanan	25

## FICTION

Mr. Rudishill by Angela Davis, UNC-G	4
What Are You Doing Saturday Night by Sylvia Wiseman, UNC-G	16
Before Twilight by Diane Oliver, UNC-G	21

## POETRY

Wayward Horse by Jeffrey S. Granger, UNC-G	7
The Dead Sailors: To One On The Shore by Sylvia Eidam, UNC-G	8
Witch and Toad by Sylvia Eidam, UNC-G	9
Last Spring by Tina Hillquist, UNC-G	9
Golgotha by Ellen Bryant, Converse College	10
Poem by Michael Gregory, Pennsylvania State University	11
Daughter of Eve by Jane Grossnickle, UNC-G	11
The Storm by Ruth Dawson, University of Houston	12
Peace by Doug Uzzell, University of Houston	12
Interlocutrix by Doug Uzzell, University of Houston	12
The Fisherman, Away by Ruth Dawson, University of Houston	13
Desideratum by Martha Prothro, UNC-G	14
A Bedside Clock Before A Sleepless Dream by Martha Prothro, UNC-G	14
For Jocelyn's Bastard Son: Born Dead by Martha Prothro, UNC-G	15

# Mr. Rudishill

by ANGELA DAVIS  
UNC-G

"Get me a cup of hot water right now," Mae said.

Mrs. Carson never swore out loud. The water spigot burped and sputtered, then gushed muddy-colored water.

"Hotter than that," Mae said. "It's for my gas."

Mrs. Carson let the water run full force and leaned against the windowsill. Light rain fell against the window bars and splattered Mrs. Carson's back. She thought barred windows silly; in this building, the women were weak and so old they smelled and felt of death. She hated to bring them from the ward to this room, for they leaned against her and she could feel the brittle bone beneath the papery skin of their wrists and fingers and smell their loose, unwashed bodies. Their eyes trembled in shrunken faces as they looked at her, pleading.

Mrs. Carson looked at the small grey room, the glass front cabinets which lined one wall, the picture of braided Gretel made from cloth (Hansel had fallen to the floor), and on the wall opposite her, the mirror bordered with a ruffle. In the mirror she could see the bottom half of her white uniform and athletic legs crossed at the ankles. Her ladies were seated at two tables, Annie, Ruth, and Mae at the one closest to her, Mrs. Conner and Susie at the other. All but Mae were bent over their sewing, their shoulders hunched as they labored through needles through bits of cloth.

Mae sat idle, neglecting her scrapbook. One arm lay on the table, the other rested akimbo on her hip, Mrs. Carson felt, in defiance. Mae stared at her, a mixed expression of anger and defeat on her tilted face. Mrs. Carson put the cup of water before Mae and sat down at the table.

Mae had brought a doll with her; it was an ugly nude rubber one. She poked it in the eye with her scissors.

"Why, Mae," Mrs. Carson said, "don't hurt your sweet baby."

Mae belched, as a prelude. "I'm no mental patient," she said, "so don't take that tone with me, Mrs. Therapy-worker."

"I think I'm mental," Ruth said. She had a sweet, placid face. Mrs. Carson liked her.

"That's a cute dress you've got on, Ruth," she said.

Ruth smiled. "Yeah, isn't it. Look, it buttons and unbuttons." There were two brass buttons at the top of the bodice. She carefully unbuttoned and buttoned them.

"Brass?"

"No!" Ruth looked shocked. "Gold. If they was brass I'd throw 'em down and go 'bout my business."

"See," Mae said, "she's mental, I ain't."

"How come you're not?" Ruth said.

Annie dropped her embroidery and looked down at the floor. "Don't you talk back to me, John Chatham," she said to the tiles.

"How come?" Ruth asked Mae again.

"Shut up. How can I talk when you butt in like a mental patient?" Mae began tearing whole pages out of a magazine.

"Now quit that, Mae," Mrs. Carson said. "A new magazine!"

Mae regarded her stonily, then looked at the glass-front cabinet. "That cabinet looks like a hurrah's nest," she said.

Mrs. Carson laughed. Mae was always saying that; she had been a housekeeper and couldn't stand a mess. The shelves were disorderly, piled with cloth, paints and other supplies, but she hated to poke around them for fear of cockroaches and spiders.

"You haven't told us why you're not mental, Mae," Mrs. Carson said, to make peace.

"Well," Mae said, "I wouldn't try to get away with some things the mentals do. I'm here for somethin' else. Ruth now . . ." She pointed her scissors at Ruth. "Ruth walks around stark raving naked," she whispered.

"Only in the john." Ruth slammed her hand on the table.

"Uh uh. Everywhere. In the hall, on the ward, and in my lady's chamber. And with Mr. Rudishill around. You gotta watch Ruth," she told Mrs. Carson. "Since you're new, I'll give you that tip, you gotta watch her." Mae ran her tongue over wide, slippery lips. "That Mr. Rudishill," she said softly, "he's sumpin' else."

"Thread my needle," Susie said in a whining voice. Mrs. Carson moved to the next table in relief. She had not heard of Mr. Rudishill and didn't care to. Mae had irritated her from the first day she had worked here, a little over two weeks ago, but she had enjoyed Mae's stories for a while. They made her feel knowledgeable and understanding; they were so obviously the result of the classic persecution complex she had studied at college several years ago. She could remember the page in the text where the complex was described and could remember studying it for the test but here she found a living example. So at first she looked forward to the stories eagerly, but soon discovered they almost all began the same way.

"I used to be paralyzed," was the most frequent. "Yes, that's right, paralyzed, all down this side." Mae would touch her sagging left cheek and draw her hand all the way down the left side of her body to her feet. She would watch Mrs. Carson, not the body she was touching. "An attendant done it. I's just standin' there next up to the ward door waitin' to be let out, just mindin' my own bees-wax and the attendant whopped me one on the hip. She's fattern you can imagine," she would say, "and she done it the next day too. That's how come I got the stroke the next Sunday. Eatin' some grapes, sittin' on my bed, and pow the stroke hits. Musta been on account of the attendant took me so by su'prise. An at first I wouldn't tell the doc on account of they might make it hard for me on the ward. But finally I said 'Could a lick have done it, doc, could a lick have done it?' and the doc says 'Why Mae? Why Mae?' In this story, as in all the others, the enemy was punished. The attendant was stricken with gonorrhea and fired: Mae's favorite denouement. Mrs. Carson tried to be attentive; she was afraid not to be. But after all, she reasoned, there were the other ladies who needed attention and understanding too.

Mae belched suddenly, this time very loud. "Hey," she said, after deciding Mrs. Carson wasn't going to respond to the belch, "Hey, you going to sit over there all day?"

"I'm helping Susie." Mrs. Carson began sorting embroidery thread into piles. It bothered her that she had made an excuse; she should have said something firm, yet consoling.

"Lord God have mercy on us," Mae intoned. Her voice was high and chant-like. "Lord God have mercy on all the people in this room worth the saving. God have mercy

on me. God have mercy on Ruth. God have mercy on Annie Chatham. And Lord God at the next table forgive and have mercy on two only. God have mercy on Susie Murray. Lord God please have mercy on Eva Conner." Mae turned and looked at Mrs. Carson in triumph. "Lord God save five out of six of us in this room from Mr. Rudishill." Mrs. Carson, feeling awkwardly silent and embarrassed, looked back at her. Mae laughed suddenly: a low rumble and a twitching of shoulders. "Ain't I a mess?"

"How's that scrapbook, Mae?" Mrs. Carson moved to the other table and looked at the picture Mae had clipped from a magazine. It was another frothy blue-eyed baby and a mother bending over, rich brown hair falling across her cheek. "How sweet," she said.

"You don't know 'em from a bunch of turnip greens," Mae said, "but I know 'em all too well. You won't know nothin' till you've had and lost."

Mrs. Carson smiled and nodded.

"Hey," Ruth said, "your teeth are clean. Mine usta be too but see I only have three now. Brushed 'em all away." Mrs. Carson raised her eyebrows and Ruth nodded emphatically. "Brushed 'em all away. Can't hardly eat now. I've only had three meals in the last two years."

"Oh, Ruth, that's not so."

"Yes, ma'am." Ruth grinned, then became serious. "A veal cutlet, a grapefruit and uh . . . an egg." Her eyes were glazed in reminiscence. "A cup of coffee once too, I believe. That's on accounta no teeth. Usta have an eye tooth here and an eye tooth here . . ." She pointed carefully.

"That Mr. Rudishill," Mae said, "I bet his teeth bite like a hoss."

"All right," Mrs. Carson said, "who in the world is Mr. Rudishill?"

Mae's mouth began to work violently. She dropped her scissors and looked at Mrs. Carson. "That Mr. Rudishill," she said, breathing heavily, "that man is after me."

Ruth locked her hands under her armpits and cackled. "If any man is after anybody, it's me."

Mae gave her a scalding look. "Just you hush your mouth, MISS nudity. You might try as you will, look bug-eyed at every man on the bus ride and carry on like you do, you'll never get one if you live to a hundred and ten." She turned to Mrs. Carson, one hand dramatically on her bosom.

"I know plenty plus somethin' when it comes to sex," Ruth said. "But me and my husband didn't marry for that. Only went to bed three times in thirty years."

"How'd you get so many children?" Mrs. Carson said.

"He just touched me on the arm and ping it come out my nose."

Mae threw her doll across the room. She looked at it on the floor. "Elsie, honey." She heaved herself from the chair to retrieve it, then fell back in her seat and turned to Mrs. Carson. "That Mr. Rudishill's got more in mind than touchin' me on the arm." Mrs. Carson drew away from Mae's intense face and her smell of unwashed clothes. Mae leaned closer, her eyes large and full and hypnotic. "He's been watchin' and slurpin' at me for I don't recollect how many months. Every day I go on a walk, see, up by Brown Building, and there he is, just lookin' from behind the corner."

"Sex is dirty," Mrs. Conner said from across the room. "I'm getting out." Mrs. Carson watched her collect her crochet needles and wool and push open the door.

"How do you get outside, Mae?" Mrs. Carson said smiling.

Mae looked at her steadily. "Like I tole a judge once, that's for me to know and you to find out, if you can. But don't you worry bout him none. He's after me." She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

Susie trembled against the table's edge. She had wet her dress. "Back to the ward, please, Susie," Mrs. Carson said. It was almost time for lunch anyway, she thought, time for them all to go.

"Are you going to pay me mind or not?" Mae's hand clenched Mrs. Carson's wrist. "If I am paralyzed again," she said slowly, emphasizing each word, "If I am, it'll be his fault. That man, Mr. Rudishill. You wouldn't save me from him if I was on my deathbed. You wouldn't even give me a piece of candy if it would save my life, you'd just rustle around in that prissy white dress an say no Grace Mae Hensley no candy you have diabetes. Even if it would save my life you wouldn't." Her face was distorted, sucked in as if she had eaten a big lemon.

"Now Mae," Mrs. Carson said. "Mae, don't be silly."

Mae sighed and released Mrs. Carson's arm.

"Now, Mae," Mrs. Carson said, "you know you don't go outside. Even if you did, there's no one to hurt you."

"Oh yes. There's Mr. Rudishill." Mae nodded slowly and looked out the window. Her eyes were vague, focused on a distant point. "Just yestiddy I found out his name. I crep up to his corner at Brown Building and peeked around and I could see him lookin' at me, his eyes all glittery and his nose runnin' and I says 'what's your name man an he says Rudishill. The sun was bearin' down so hard I could barely make out anything but that and his glitterin' eyes. An then he says real low, 'woman, I don't even *care* what your name is. And then he shook out everything he had, with me just standin' there like that and he laughed and laughed you never heard the like. I ran like the devil was clutchin' at my shoestrings an fell on my bed to pray to the Lord God our Saviour in Heaven."

Annie slapped her thigh. "Don't you bring no more Bufferin' in this house, John Chatham."

"He's after me, all right. And me such a frail thing." Mae touched Mrs. Conner's arm and looked at her sadly. "I don't know what I'll do if he gets me."

"You ain't so frail, honey," Ruth said. "You're just afraid he won't get you, that's what." She plucked at her buttons.

"I'm not comin' back in here again," Mae said. She walked across the room and stopped at the door. "This place is a hurrah's nest," she said, without looking back. She slammed the door behind her and thudded down the hall.

Mr. Rudishill's appearance in Mae's mind frightened Mrs. Carson, frightened her the more because she didn't know why. She often thought of him at home, brooded over Mae's piece of fiction until it ceased to be fiction and she could see Mr. Rudishill and his glittering eyes and she shuddered, feeling dirty and sinful even though repulsed. She might be doing some little thing, like making the beds or reading her Sunday school lesson, and Mr. Rudishill would come to her like a slap. At work, however, she made Mr. Rudishill a joke, a basis on which to re-establish a rapport with Mae every day so as to avoid lame silence before her stare. "How's Mr. you-know-who these days?" "Who?" "You-know-who. Starts with an R." "Rogers?" "Nooo . . ." Some days Mae would clench Mrs. Carson's hand and say, "Mr. Rudishill, he's sumpin' else. Shakin' out everythin' he's got with me just standin' there." But usually she would say "Mr. Rudishill, who's he?"

One morning about two weeks after first hearing of Mr. Rudishill, Mrs. Carson arrived at work late with a headache. A sullen nurse watched her enter the building,

then looked pointedly at the hall clock. Mrs. Carson hurried the ladies from the ward to the room, avoiding the nurse's eyes. The ladies settled down to work happily, turning their old faces to the window, to the flood of April sunlight and the comfortable noise of workmen talking on the lawn outside.

Mae was electric: giddy and sullen in spurts.

Mrs. Carson straightened a shelf in the cabinet, then sat at the table with Annie, Ruth and Mae.

Mae looked at her, waiting, paste brush poised in the air.

"Well, good morning, sunshine," Mrs. Carson said.

"Good morning, cloud," Mae said. She laughed and laughed, holding her side with one hand.

Ruth scratched her grey head. "A thief came last night. Stole three of my pink silk dresses and threw lead down my throat."

Mrs. Carson wished she had brought her aspirin.

"Men's always been after me," Mae said. She moved her mouth happily and folded her arms across her chest. "In Norfolk one day a sailor looked at me on the bridge so I started walkin'. I walked alla way from that bridge to Gramerley's Shoe Store. Well! I tried on shoes and he tried on shoes! I was in W. T. Grant's and he was in W. T. Grant's! Finally he comes up and says 'honey, meet me at six-thirty at the Eatwell.' So I smiles an says 'sure thing' and beats it home. That night I was washin' the dishes and watchin' that clock and laughin'. Mama says what you laughin' for Grace Mae Hensley, and I tells her. She says 'honey, you done the right thing.' Mae laughed again and Mrs. Carson laughed with her. "It's a mess then, just like now, and a good lookin' mess, too."

Annie walked to the mirror and bent down to look, her arms folded behind her back. She looked at her face as if it were far away and someone had just pointed it out to her. Her eyes were narrow slits behind her glasses; she rocked forward and back gently.

"Weren't you married then, Mae?" Ruth said.

"Huh?"

"Married. Weren't you married. Before, when you told that you were married."

"Yeah. I reckon I was married once. Me and Bill had some time in bed. Uh huh."

"Sex." Mrs. Conner said, "sex, sex, sex."

Ruth patted Mae's hand. "That's all right, dearie, you just have a dirty mind."

Mae's face turned stony. "It's men what has dirty minds." She looked at Mrs. Carson a long time. "My husband did."

"Where's your sweet baby, Mae?" Mrs. Carson said.

"Dead. Stone stiff. Tried to kill me, she did." Mae clutched the table edge. "Tried to kill me." Mae's voice cracked.

"Don't be ridiculous, Mae," Mrs. Carson said.

"Ri-dic-u-lous. You're ridiculous. You'd try to kill me if you could, you'd deny me candy on my deathbed if you had the only piece in the world and the doctor begged and begged." She rapped on the table with the scissors. "You don't know A from bullsfoot cause you haven't lost a baby that tried to kill. That man done it. Mr. Rudishill. Mr. Rudishill!" Mae was screaming now.

"Stop." Mrs. Carson slapped Mae's hand. "Stop it right now." Mrs. Carson spoke carefully, trying to reason. "Mae, we don't want to hear about Rudishill today. My little boy is sick and we missed a payment on the car . . ."

"My cataracts are actin' up," Mae said. "I swear. I swear I've been through H E double L and drup up and down the chimney twice."

"Mmmm." Mrs. Carson looked out the window.

Mae belched. "That Mr. Rudishill. My heart palpates. I'm gettin' nervous."

"It's the change of life," Ruth said. "That's all, dearie."

"I may not look it but I passed that, so shut up. It's that Rudishill." She banged the table with her fist.

"Mae," Mrs. Carson said, "Let's not hear about him today." Mrs. Carson's palms were wet; she felt suffocated. She walked to the window and looked out at the lawn and the trees in the distance. "Just please be quiet."

"No," Mae yelled. "No. Do you know what it's like?" Mrs. Carson turned around and saw Mae rip a button from Ruth's dress and run across the room to the glass-front cabinet.

"Mae now . . . sit down, honey."

Mae thrust her fist through the pane and held her arm there against the jagged glass. "Mr. Rudishill will get me TODAY," she screamed.

Mrs. Carson ran to the cabinet and jerked Mae's limp arm from the glass. She looked down at it, looked at the blood on the limp wrinkled arm.

"Today. His eyes glitter." She began to cry.

"Calm down now, Mae," Mrs. Carson tried to push her towards the table.

"Lookit Mae," Mrs. Conner said, "her eyes glitter."

"Let's go get a bandaid," Mrs. Carson said. She thought perhaps she should call for the nurse.

"No no," Mae said, "I've gotta tell you." She pulled her hairnet down over one ear. Her old face was wet with tears. "I wanta tell you somethin. I'm no mental patient. I'm in here for threatnin' to kill. But I didn't cause like I tole the judge threats like that are dangerous."

"Come on, Mae, honey"

"NO." She held Mrs. Carson's arms, pinned her against the cabinet. Mrs. Carson felt weak, nauseated by Mae's close hot smell and the blood from the old arm on hers.

"The judge sentenced me to a work farm. I savs judge I'm not a goin' cause I didn't threaten. He savs how you gonna get out of it. I savs that's for me to know and you to find out, if you can."

Mrs. Carson looked at Ruth, who winked and said, "It's Mae's change of life, dearie."

Mae pressed harder on Mrs. Carson's arms. "That afternoon. The trial was on a Wednesday morning. That afternoon I got on top of the double-decker bunks and put a belt around my neck, just for foolin'." Mae threw back her head and laughed wildlv. "Talk about unlockin' a door and gettin' in there quick that sheriff sure did." She laughed again, then became solemn.

"My husband tole me to do somethin' dirty an me his wife! So dirty an horrible I only tell it when I have to. I told him I'd knife him and I meant it, by sweet Jesus. I threw a kitchen chair through the window to attract attention. He deserted an mv daughter run off an I haven't seen her since she was fifteen." She began to cry again, this time softly. "That's whv I have my baby doll."

"Baby doll," Mrs. Conner echoed.

Mae cocked her head and looked at Mrs. Carson through bright tears. "Don't you never . . . don't you never feel like you're in a hurrah's nest?"

Mrs. Carson looked at her and Mae's face became vividly clear, as if it were etched and cut out and pasted on the rest of the room. She saw Mr. Rudishill's evil grin, the glittering sunlight on his hair and eyes and teeth and saw Mae, her face heavy with sadness.

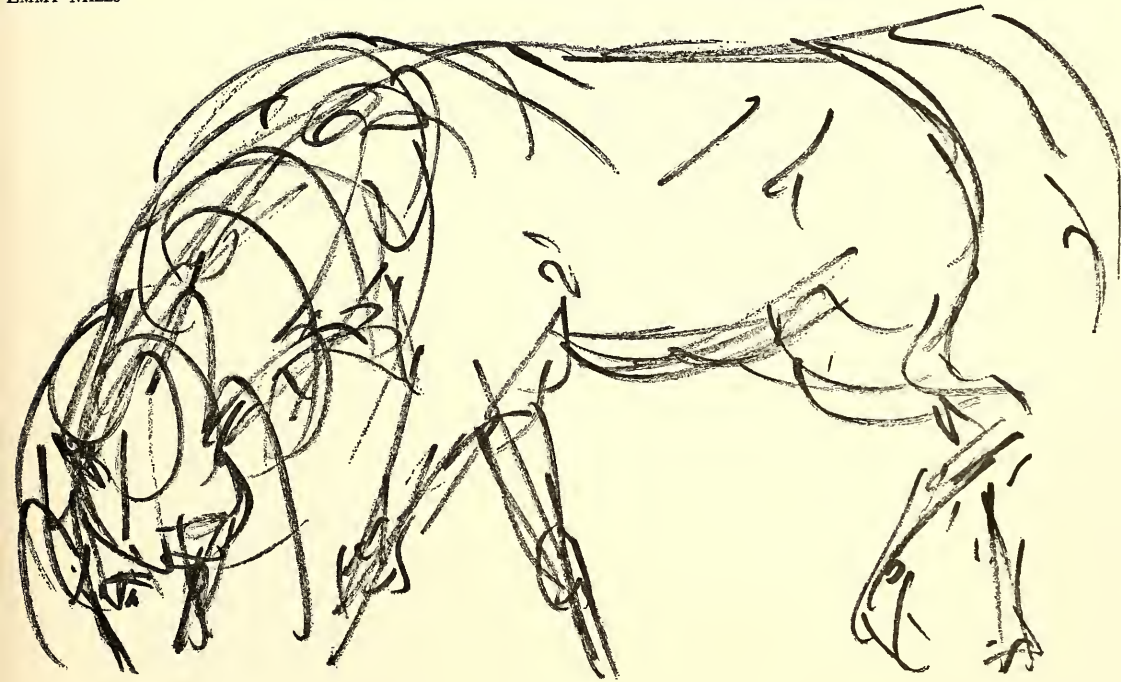
"Yes, Mae," she said.

## Wayward Horse

I'll try once more to break him,  
That one there,  
The snorting demon of a wayward horse.  
See how he stands against the gate,  
His checkbones resting on the topmost rail?  
He's looking out to pasture, but all he's done  
With all that tearing at the poles  
Is bare his cannon tendons to the bone.  
I'll have him,  
Or send him, as I swore,  
To fetch his market price in fishing bait  
When Jake can come to haul the carcass out.  
This time I'll press him to the post  
If I should heave him to his death against the ropes.  
He's long past use to me with all his rearing, snorting ways.  
But today we'll clear the thing between us, once and all.  
My God, what folly makes him toss and pitch against the lines?  
There's no way round the halter and the breaker's hand  
But somehow ends with dangling from a butcher's hooks.

JEFFREY S. GRANGER  
UNC-G

LINE DRAWING  
EMMY MILLS



## The Dead Sailors: To One On The Shore

We who have passed, longing, to the sea,  
We who have died in the sea,  
Sometimes walk the sand  
Roam the sea edge, trackless,  
When the waves are down;  
And one we see each dawn,  
Is to us a sister.  
Marveling at her pale free glory,  
How she winds her hair with salt drops  
And twists our joy to sorrow with a song,  
We fancy, even, she has wings  
Like gulls a-storm,  
Flying sidewise to the wind.

Were our tongues the small-flecked waves  
We would lick her basking toes  
And then endeavor sweetly,  
Our weak mouths all on hers,  
To suck out the threads of life.  
But she plays away from water  
And her eyes strike skyward, not at sea,  
Searching for the noise of lonely birds,  
Strong-lipped sea-birds.  
Late, she turns, full of watching,  
Grey eyes to the static sands,  
Her footsteps tracing dips of silver  
And loudly crying, still,  
As we put out to green rest,  
Speaking not of morning and the day.  
There in weedy wreaths,  
Half a-dream we lie,  
Thinking birds may die  
And fill the waves with feathers;  
Then, that we could fly.

SYLVIA EIDAM  
UNC-G

## Last Spring

Grandmother sat on the garden wall  
Counting her silver forks,  
Her nightgown torn by the bricks of the wall,  
And a daffodil over her ear.

No fish were in the garden pond,  
And she saw the water was clear,  
So she counted her forks one more time;  
Then threw three of them in.

She wanted to make a pretty sound,  
To maybe see them swim.  
But then the paper nurse came out,  
With the hat straight on her head,

To take Grandmother by the hand  
And lead her back to bed.  
She dropped the forks in an apron pocket,  
Plucked the daffodil from Grandmother's hair.

She pulled her through the old French doors;  
Sat her in the bedroom chair.  
The new nightgown out of the drawer  
Was the same as the one before;

And she dressed Grandmother clean again,  
And wiped her face and hands.  
There were new-ironed sheets on the wide old bed,  
And she put Grandmother there.

There were new-ironed sheets on her marriage bed,  
But grandmother lay quite still.  
Grandfather's portrait hung over her head,  
And the nurse had taken her daffodil.

TINA HILLQUIST  
UNC-G

## Witch and Toad

Unwared friend, we have hunched too long  
In this enchanted wood, stretched tight  
With small wrinkles. Our song  
For rain has come to nothing.

It has happened that children have feared  
My kiss, seeing that I kept friendship  
With such a one as you,  
And have all sought other rooms  
And not my antiqued frog-house.

Useless the years spent in hunting them.  
Old and empty flap my hands;  
I have found no potion save that  
Which dribbles down my eyes,  
Which is jabbed through these clotted fingers  
By the wind, to water brown dirt  
For a thirsty, dying toad.

See. The silence  
Crawls along my skin like so many bugs.

Now, that the night has come again,  
That my heart is somewhat patched  
With these spotted leaves dropped here  
Upon our backs, let us stop this bootless talk.  
I will sit alone with you  
And we will sing for those sterile tears,  
And for the children who ran away.

SYLVIA EIDAM  
UNC-G

## Golgotha

### I

I was a child and knew the moon  
when it was barely more than some night's idea  
of cloud-strung slender smoke  
and then again when it bore the dark  
as easy as some fires wear red.  
Those were young days,  
moth-winged summer grass days  
of strong-armed bending trees younger than I  
and tall green weeds  
and songs of lost lands and laughing.  
But  
all these times were floated off  
and I was growing,  
learning not at all my fragile eyes.

### II

I lumped the world into feather clay  
and built a rock where you could sit  
and feel the water on your feet.  
I sang the skies and worded stars  
on a soft chain for you to wear.  
I wrapped my self in the smoke-smooth clouds  
and threw it before your hands.  
But rock and cold,  
you would not give,  
you would not bother to know me.  
With one hand holding bread you stood,  
stone in a wide and sleeping door,  
and I wept  
and the willow arms of rain sang silent no time.

ELLEN BRYANT  
*Converse College*



## Daughter of Eve

this poem  
for  
Johnnie  
who of love  
met me  
in your five years  
after our lunch  
to show  
what for some  
girl's reason  
you decided  
I must see

in your urgent hand  
I went  
where our roses  
bend  
high above the lawn  
that has not won  
over  
the mound  
and cross  
of your white  
pet mouse

there, beside,  
bedded  
on petals  
in a fresh pit  
lay still  
and smashed  
of this morning's trap  
the rat  
I threw away  
before our breakfast

what was I to tell you  
(when I am  
nearly shriveled  
and wept  
but the moon  
has bled you  
never)  
of differences in skin

how explain to your five  
what thirty has taught me  
of cleanliness

helpless  
at your hand's  
intent  
I knelt  
in the grass  
of your prayer,  
saw you  
unwatchful  
of my silence  
fill emptiness  
with soil  
  
after  
in the kitchen  
we washed  
our hands  
and sat  
to your milk—  
discolored tea  
and listening  
eyes  
I spoke only  
of dolls  
and kittens  
starting school  
how the moon is pale  
on summer afternoons  
of what daddy  
would like  
for dinner

MICHAEL GREGORY  
*Pennsylvania State University*

Within my prison of summer dusk  
A solitary star through bars  
Of willow switches strangely cobbles  
The musky earth.  
Folds of linen, leaden white, are  
Rumpled, crumpled,  
Not so chaste now.

Willow, willow, I know your tears;  
Gypsy willow, your pale dew-blood;  
Poor willow, to twilight's dimming wall cemented,  
My prison imprisoned.

My eyes from this bed of barren twigs  
Are held by bluegreen evening fire,  
A glimpsing of the fruit of Eden  
Long denied me.  
Deep and burning its enchantments,  
Loose-hung  
On its drooping bough.

Willow, willow, I know your longing;  
Gypsy willow, your circled feet;  
Poor willow, to twilight's dimming wall cemented,  
My prison imprisoned.

The cell grows black; the star is blotted;  
The bars of willow, vanished, gone;  
Above me now the gold-edged shadow  
Of fitful sleep  
Hovers, hesitates, descends—  
Falling, falling  
On my linen.

Willow, willow, I know your cries;  
Gypsy willow, your green-pierced heart;  
Poor willow, to twilight's dimming wall cemented,  
My prison imprisoned.

The shadow lifts and falls away.  
Silence settles; again the star,  
Once more the bars, the cobbled floor.  
The willow weeps for its circled feet;  
I have my star.  
The bluegreen fire will come again, sanctifying  
This unhallowed earth.

JANE GROSSNICKLE  
UNC-G

WATERCOLOR  
BETTY BIRKE

## The Storm

The cane bends low and a parrot  
draws in his wings. Trees cannot hold  
the dark nor the clouds  
for the spin over the fields.  
Rain comes and beats the leaves  
and rice and one lone stallion  
whose speed is like that lightning  
which now excites him. Here in this horse  
was the old man's dream. In this,  
was his season's sweat. He came  
from the house through the whistling cane  
to the stable he had made that spring  
with his hands. But the washing of sky,  
the falling of limbs, little gulls  
in the earth, relit the wildness.  
The time of quiet grazing meant little now . . .  
in the flood of peach blossoms, twigs and moss.  
The white devil broke and ran into the storm—  
and was but a trail of dim smoke  
in the drenched valley. The farmer felt  
naked and laid his wet head against the oak door.  
Seeing his summer gone, he had to admit  
that he was old.  
For him, the stallion had been  
a stop between death and dreams.

After the storm, the old man  
gathered a few peach blossoms and walked  
to his cottage. The parrot, wet and brilliant,  
lifted its wings and left the trees.  
The moon came out over the whispering cane.  
But the man sat in a chair  
holding the pale blossoms. He looked  
at the plough and thought of the mule  
sleeping undisturbed in the other stall.  
In the valley, the new moon was white as steel,  
but there was no sign of the stallion.

The old man dozed and dropped his blossoms,  
and as they fell, they sounded in his sleep  
like the wild gait of dying horses.

RUTH DAWSON  
*University of Houston*

## Peace

Flakes of earth  
tumble down the walls  
of warm mouse tracks—  
at trail's end a ragged excavation.  
A stuffed owl  
flies for a drink of water.

DOUG UZZELL  
*University of Houston*

## Interlocutrix

Dusk.  
A wood witch lolls on a path  
of packed earth,  
soft  
as the damp  
of decaying leaves . . .

Hums,  
stirring an ant hill . . .

Laughs  
like a sudden owl hoot  
or dog bark  
or the shrill last whistle  
of a dying rabbit  
when the ants boil out.

She cocks a pointed ear  
to hear their shrieks.  
(The thinness of their hysteria  
is like the fingers of ladies  
painted on fine china.)

Uncrooks,  
she, one love talon,  
diminishes the flow  
by one  
two  
three,  
deliberately . . .

Falls  
to her back  
to clap  
for miniature souls  
rushing universeward,  
only to pop  
into sparkling showers  
before they have risen  
above the trees.

DOUG UZZELL  
*University of Houston*

## The Fisherman, Away

I could tell you of honey poppies,  
of greenfinch fields,  
and how the bayous move  
when the crayfish cry.

I could tell you  
that a tiny sailboat slips  
beneath my pillow  
when I dream, silently  
as the moon  
to draw the tides of sleep.

The moon moves under shadows  
of my sleeplessness and stays  
as do those seedpods  
which conceal themselves  
between the layers of your glove,  
and we never find them  
until you come home.

I could tell you I felt  
the waters with you when you sailed,  
the salt inside you  
as you trembled against the sea.

Green seas hold you steadfast  
in the stream of water wizards  
who string our oaths like sea wreathes  
to clothe naked shoals.

I tell you I am the dove  
who circles your silence  
and carries the green of deliverance  
to your ship. Like God, I loved you,  
Noah. Sea chosen, and shimmering captain  
in a fathomless world.

I have told you because I dreamed.  
Wreath my ears with rings of searoses.  
Brush the sun from my lips  
when I spring from the foam.

This I say to you  
because you come home  
with the fishermen,  
their nets full of joyful fish  
and ripe sea melons,  
and your sails  
are like stars in my throat.

RUTH DAWSON  
*University of Houston*

## Desideratum

### I.

I have been with you  
In empty rooms unlighted.  
Waiting to speak, I  
Touched your wrist, lip, fingertip.  
I have watched black firs  
In the white-gold twilit sky;  
My arms on the sill,  
My head on my hand, waiting.

And all the days gone  
And done and damaged and dead;  
All the nights silent  
And longed for, loved in, and lost.  
My head on my knees.  
Your asking what's wrong? And what's  
Wrong? Quivering lids,  
Kissed and cool and closed. Waiting.

### II.

Imperceptibly,  
The morning came to catch us  
Unaware at love,  
Pressing at the glass quickly,  
Pulling at our shoes  
Beside the bed; surprising  
Us at breakfast juice;  
Reading the World and waiting.

The years which have pushed  
Have passed and pulled us. We have  
Given up the touch.  
We speak to tempt the memory  
Of breath blown dreaming  
On your shoulder, all a sigh;  
Sleeping at sunrise,  
A sea-sleep, tided, all a sigh . . .

MARTHA PROTHRO  
UNC-G



JEAN ELLEN JONES  
WOODCUT

## A Bedside Clock Before A Sleepless Dream

Alone—the word has gummed the works:  
The red hand circulates your face so slow.  
I find my fingers in my mouth again,  
My tiny tendernesses, like a child's small gifts,  
Not understood, but Thank you, (just the same), dear.  
I took them chicken salad when the old man died.  
I took them heavy cakes at Christmastime.  
I gave their children cookies when they cried,  
And let them smell my cats,  
And put their sticky fingers on my polished woods.  
And last night, with my cane and linen dress,  
I passed their house on my last legs.  
I'll close my doors and bar them and turn my oven off.  
I'll call my cats and kill them and take my linen off.  
So soft the words repeat themselves in whispers,  
With expectations subtly grown to sleep.  
I turn my pillow fluffy,  
Press my palsied hands against this wall.

MARTHA PROTHRO  
UNC-G



### For Jocelyn's Bastard Son: Born Dead

All night I'm under a silken sheet  
And drinking green-leaf tea,  
Awake because I cannot weep  
For my son who weeps for me.  
And splashing luke-warm water,  
And speaking rather low,  
And never waking my lover,  
And never letting him know,  
I rise before his morning  
And carry my cotton dress,  
And wander through my yesterday things,  
And play with my colored, un-diamond rings.  
And looking long from this window,  
The same window, sipping my tea . . .

Oh bend, oh bend to my boy whose sin  
Was daring, desiring to be.

For a song, a song from my blood-born boy,  
While the wails of the dawn begin,  
Limbs and leaves in their half-belief  
In the wind begin to bend.  
Oh, bend to my own boy now.  
I presume to pay for his sin,  
For the sake of his unformed, unborn face,  
From out of the saddest, weariest place . . .

Oh bend, oh bend to my boy whose sin  
Was daring, desiring to be.

MARTHA PROTHRO  
UNC-G

# What Are You Doing Saturday Night?

by SYLVIA WISEMAN  
UNC-G

The wild sunset woke her, threading through the venetian blind, casting bars across her bare legs. She was startled for a moment, seeing those shadows across her body. She had been dreaming of a long, dark corridor with no openings. She had run up and down it looking for a door or a window when suddenly a light came from the opposite end. She ran toward it, calling: Mother, Mother! I didn't let him touch me, I didn't! It was then she woke to see the narrow, dark lines on her legs and slip, almost as if they were holding her down tight against the sheet. She even made a gesture to move them before she sat up, realizing almost immediately how ridiculous it seemed.

She seldom slept in the afternoon and that was probably why the sleep had not helped her head. That dull pain still crushed against her forehead. She left the bedroom, walking into the bath to run cold water over her hands, cupping them to dash the water on her face. As she looked at the bathroom mirror, she again saw how much the lines around her eyes and mouth made her look as she remembered her mother. He did touch me, she said to her own reflection in the mirror. He did touch me that night, Mother. We left choir practice and came home in his car and he parked in the driveway. We sat there a long time, listening to the radio. Then, I realized that his hand was inside my coat, rubbing me so softly. I thought: we've just been singing together in a church, singing hymns and the minister was there and this can't be happening now in my own front yard with my mother inside the house. But it was. And I didn't say anything, just sat very still and didn't move and after a while he stopped and said: it's late. And I went into the house. That's when you saw me and asked how long had we been outside in the car and whether he had touched me. Shameless, you said. You're the shameless daughter of your wretched father. And I screamed that he didn't touch me. And when I cried, you came and lay down in the bed beside me and stroked my forehead until I went to sleep.

She threw some water at the mirror, watching it dribble down, streaking her mirror-face like so many tears. Then she wet a cloth and put it loosely around her neck and went back to the bed to sit down and light a cigarette. Outside, the sunset had diminished into a bank of pinkish gold framing the houses she could see from the window.

Margaret had taken the room since it was close to the school. Small furnished room with private bath, the ad read. Teachers or bachelors only. But, of course, the ad said nothing about Mrs. Cabbage Patch who treated each of her roomers as if they were members of her family.

Mrs. Cabbage Patch wasn't the woman's name. She was really Mrs. Medford Carter; but less than three weeks after Margaret had arrived, Mrs. Carter's actions and her devoted attentions to her 'guests', reminded Margaret of a story she read as a child and vaguely remembered. It was about a small rabbit who visited a forbidden cabbage patch each evening and a farmer or a farmer's wife who kept vigilance over that patch. Since Margaret couldn't remember the farmer or his wife's name, she began calling Mrs. Carter—Mrs. Cabbage Patch.

The first morning after she had moved into Mrs. Car-

ter's furnished room, Margaret heard a radio down the hallway blast forth with some very loud music. She looked at her travel clock on the nightstand. It was six-thirty. And although the music stopped a minute or so later, she could not go back to sleep for that extra fifteen minutes she needed to face a new class in a new school. The second morning, the radio was loudly blaring at six-thirty and a few minutes later, it was silent again. As Margaret left her room for school, she met Mrs. Carter in the hallway.

"Did I hear a radio playing early this morning, Mrs. Carter?" she asked.

"Yes, my dear, you certainly did. Did it wake you?" Mrs. Carter answered.

"Yes," she said. "Yesterday and today."

"Well, that's nice," Mrs. Carter replied. "My daughter, when she was living here, said that waking up to a radio was much better than waking up to a terrible alarm clock; so every morning now I set my clock radio for six-thirty, so all my boys and girls can wake up to music. Personally, I wake up automatically. Have all my life. Right at six a. m. on the button, I'm up and ready for a new day. But so many young folks live so fast these days, they're just exhausted when they turn in and it's so very hard for them to wake up without some kind of device.

As Margaret walked to school that same morning, she remembered how in college, her roommate had always put the Baby Ben under the wastebasket to make the alarm sound louder. Margaret would jump at the shattering buzzer and would lay there gritting her teeth until finally her roommate rolled over, stuck her head from under the sheet and turned off the alarm. Later, Margaret learned to wake just at the same time the clock made a small click, the signal that the alarm would ring in seconds. Then she would pounce on it and push the button in, waiting until she stopped trembling before she called her roommate to get up. They woke up like that nearly every morning for four years. And at night, while Margaret studied, her roommate bounced from bed to bed throughout the dormitory, wearing only her panties and her pajama shirt, her hair in curlers, a cigarette constantly burning from the corner of her mouth. Each night, Margaret watched the ritual: her roommate standing before the mirror, rolling each dark strand of her hair, wearing only her bra and panties. Her tanned skin seemed flawless. Margaret looked at her, clenching her pillow up under her neck, holding it tightly until her roommate had slipped on her pajama shirt and left the room. Then she began studying or would read herself to sleep before her roommate returned.

The early morning radio wake-up service was only one of Mrs. Medford Carter's cheery devices to make her boarders feel as if they were right at home. Many times as Margaret was starting to unlock the front door of the house, suddenly the door would open, almost jerking the key from her hand and there would be Mrs. Cabbage Patch smiling and saying: Would you like a cup of hot chocolate before you go to your room? Mrs. Carter's front door was locked immediately at ten p.m. And although Margaret and every other boarder had a front door key, they always tried to be at home before ten o'clock to pre-

vent having to accept Mrs. Carter's invitation. Even now, Margaret could taste that thick, sweet chocolate clinging to her tongue.

She drew on her cigarette again, then crushed it in the ashtray on the nightstand and opened the venetian blind. The mercury vapor street lights were flickering pale blue spurts, trying to catch and hold their soft brilliance. It was Saturday night and she was going to have to decide how to get through another weekend. She could go to a movie, but she had seen the feature twice. The library wouldn't open again until Monday. The museum would be closed until two o'clock Sunday. There were the essays to read and grade, but she wanted to save those until Sunday night. She wondered how many other Saturday nights she had spent in double-feature movies, free concerts and lectures and once, that year in New York, a night-time of walking people-filled streets in the areas of gaudy Times Square. Finally, around midnight, she would buy a half-dozen doughnuts and take the subway to 86th Street, then slowly walk seven blocks up Lexington to the room she rented.

Why don't you move into the Barbizon, her mother had written. It's such a lovely, organized place and you will get to know so many nice young girls. If you're determined to do this thing, Margaret, to stay away from your Mother for a year in that tacky place, you certainly ought to spend your time doing worth-while things. The dear Lord knows I've certainly tried all my life to be a good parent and to see to it that you went to college and met the right kind of people. You and I both have had to learn to live down the shame that came to us when your father was found drunk and dead in that hotel room in Memphis.

Each week during that New-York-City-Year, Margaret opened her mother's letter and read the same message in fifty-two different ways. About two months after she arrived in New York, Nancy, the other secretary in the advertising firm where she worked said: Don't be so serious, Margaret. Come on to my place and I'll introduce you to some fellows. This can be a swinging town. These guys are Jewish, so you don't have to get involved. I mean, they just like fooling around. They'll never ask girls like us to marry them. Margaret went downtown to Nancy's several Saturday nights. They sat on the floor on huge, heavy pillows, nibbled cheese and crackers and drank. Nancy laughed a lot, her face glowing pink and pretty and soft in the dimly lighted room. The two boys, both dark and stocky, said hello to Margaret and then they talked to Nancy, grinning each time she said something amusing. Margaret would leave first; the boys saying goodnight, it's nice to have seen you again and Nancy yelling see you Monday at the office as she closed the door behind her. Their laughter followed Margaret down the long stairway to the street.

One Saturday night, the boys left first and Nancy said: stay with me. It's nearly two and I wouldn't want you to go uptown on a subway at this hour. I've got some extra junk you can use and there's enough stuff here for breakfast. We can go to a movie, or something, tomorrow and you can go back to your place later.

Although Margaret had spent many nights roaming the streets at two, she stayed. Later, when she knew Nancy had fallen asleep, she sat up in bed and looked at the girl's face, no longer pink, but pale in the almost dark room where only a sliver of light came through the apartment window. She reached over and touched the girl's bare shoulder. Nancy moved, pulling her body away. Margaret sat still for a moment longer, then lay down and moving over as near to the edge of the bed as she could, she fell asleep.

The next day after breakfast of coffee and toast,

Margaret said: I'm expecting a long distance phone call this afternoon, Nancy. I'd better go on back to the apartment. We can make that movie some other time. Nancy replied: Well, okay, I think I'll skip it, too. I'll just call up the boys and ask if they'd like to come over instead. See you tomorrow at the office.

The next three or four Saturdays that Nancy asked her to drop by, Margaret said that she was busy. Finally, Nancy stopped asking and unless the weather was too cold, Margaret walked up and down the neon-lighted streets, taking a late subway and her bag of doughnuts to 86th street around midnight.

Margaret knew that if she sat there any longer, Mrs. Carter would be calling at her door, so she put on her trench coat over her slip, slid her bare feet into her flat-heel shoes and left the room, closing the door quietly behind her. She stood still for a minute. Even when she was very quiet, it seemed just her breathing could bring Mrs. Carter to the hallway to say: Going out for a bit to eat? Come on in with me and I'll fix us both a little scrambled eggs and toast. My daughter would never eat breakfast, but she always said that a real Saturday night supper consisted of eggs and toast.

The night air felt cool against her still-moist skin. She ran down the sidewalk, shaking her head from side to side, so that her hair would blow loose from her damp neck. She ran two blocks, then walked one block, noticing that she was breathing evenly. How's that, she thought, for an old woman who smokes a pack a day? Even when I was ten and ran like that, I would puff a little. Now at twenty-six, I'm still a good runner.

She stopped at Tony's Place and looked through the window between the Beer ABC Number 3-1-8-1 sign and the all-day Brunswick Stew at the Second Methodist Church poster. Tony's was nearly empty, only a couple in the corner booth and a man at the counter. It was too early for the teen-agers who sometimes stopped in on a Saturday night to play the juke box. She pushed open the door and sat down at a table near the kitchen.

"What'll you have, Margaret," the plump waitress Nellie asked. "The same?"

"That's okay," Margaret answered. "Only let me have a beer now; then bring me another when the hamburger steak is ready."

"Tony'll hurry it up if you want him to," Nellie said.

Margaret glanced up at the large plastic-faced clock. By the Martinsburg Credit Jewelers electric it was seven.

"You know that's always a half-hour fast," Nellie said. "It makes the customers enjoy that extra thirty minutes they think they get before the beer curfew." She walked away to the kitchen.

After her short, fast run and the steamy heat coming from the kitchen, Margaret felt warm again and started to remove her coat when she remembered she didn't have a dress on. She turned back the coat collar, took two hair pins from her pocketbook and twisted her hair into a bun on top of her head. Nellie brought her a tall can of beer and she drank half of it in almost one gulp.

"The couple in the booth are from across the county line," Nellie said, "and the man at the counter is a salesman. He don't live around here. Comes from some place in Georgia but I met him when I used to work at the Truck Stop on Highway 70 and when I came here to work, he started coming over here to eat when he's in town. 'Course it's about ten miles off the main road, but you know how some men are." Nellie grinned and walked back to the kitchen.

Margaret looked at the man at the counter and almost immediately clutched her stomach with her empty hand.

His arms were dark with thick, black hair even to where they disappeared under his short sleeve shirt. Dark, dirty, she thought. She turned her head towards the clock again and began watching the second hand. But even the movement of that red line ticked out dark, dirty, dark, dirty. She tried to blank out her thoughts, tried to think of jingles she could recite, but each time her rhymes would beat out that even dum . . . dum-dum . . . and she would find herself thinking of the large man at the counter, picturing him as Nellie must have seen him. Not truly as Nellie would see him, but as she, Margaret, would see him if she saw him completely male before her in some dingy room. Margaret quickly drank the rest of the beer and signaled for Nellie to come back to her table.

"Look," she said. "I'd really better get out of here before some of those kids see me or worse still, somebody's parents come in. How about getting Tony to wrap that hamburger to go and I'll take the food and beer back to Mrs. Carter's."

"Won't that be worse than having a kid come in?" Nellie asked.

"No, she didn't hear me go out, so I think I can get back in. Besides by the time she comes tapping at my door, I'll have the place so full of cigarette smoke she won't even bother to smell the brew."

Nellie laughed. "You're terrible, Margaret."

"You're so right, Nellie. I'm the terrible-ist ninth grade English teacher old Martinsburg has had in many a year. But I'll tell you one thing. You're the best waitress and pal a person could have in any town."

"I believe every body ought to have some kicks, once in a while, even teachers," Nellie said. "Anyway, as long as you're a good teacher, nobody should say anything if you have a beer or two on Saturday night."

"That's right, Nellie. Good by day, a little bad at night. But it doesn't work that way."

Margaret took her packaged supper back to Mrs. Carter's. Since the door wasn't locked, she opened it quickly and hurried to her own room, locking the bedroom door before she took off her coat. She kicked it under the chair, put her package on the dresser and lay down on the bed.

It happened again, she thought. If I could just stare long enough maybe the feeling would go away. She pressed her fingers tightly against her eyes. If I just couldn't see. But then I could still touch. I'm twenty-six. I have to outgrow this. I can't be like this the rest of my life. Maybe I should try someone like Don again.

In January two years ago, she had met Don. They went to movies several times, his smooth, cool hand reaching for hers half-way through the feature. And they walked home that way, hand in hand. Each time at her doorway, he would clasp her hand between both of his, say goodnight and leave. Once, he kissed his fingertips and touched them to her cheek. I can marry this man, Margaret said to herself that night. This is the man I can marry.

In June, the weather became sticky-hot and one Saturday afternoon they went to the pool instead of a movie. Margaret quickly changed into her suit in the bath-house, hurrying to the pool before Don arrived from the men's room. She peered up over the edge of the pool and watched him walk toward her. Then she ducked under the water and swam to the other side of the pool. He thought it was a game and tried to catch her; each time he grabbed for her, she slipped away, swimming rapidly to the opposite side. Finally, they both sat gasping on the hot cement, Margaret laughing loudly and pretending the other swimmers were funny-looking.

"Look," she said. "That woman in that ridiculous bikini. It's outrageous."

"I think it's kind of cute," Don said.

"Oh, you would," Margaret said sarcastically. "You're a man."

He looked at her. "Yes, I am," he said. Then he answered her in the same sarcastic tone. "Or hadn't you noticed?"

Margaret said, "Let's change and go to the movie after all. At least it will be air-conditioned."

The picture was long and dull and when Don reached for her hand, Margaret whispered that she wanted some popcorn, so he got it for her and she sat clutching the box in both hands, nibbling popcorn occasionally until the show was over.

She never explained her actions to Don. She couldn't. On that unbearable Saturday night, she could no longer touch his soft wrists or kiss his smooth cheeks and lips. Each time she would see him as he appeared to her that afternoon in the hot summer sunlight: his white short legs thickened even more by the heavy hair. His chest a massive fuzzy pillow.

That night at her doorway when Don bent his head to kiss her, she said, "I don't feel well. I must have stayed in the sun too long this afternoon. I'll be all right after I've taken an aspirin. Call me next week." She left him standing there and when he called the following Saturday, she said she was busy. And the next Saturday, she said she had to go out of town. And then he didn't call anymore.

Margaret picked up the hamburger and beer from the dresser and went back to the bed, sitting down on the edge. Slowly, she ate the hamburger, sipping the beer, but saving most of it until she had eaten all of the sandwich. She kicked off her shoes, propped the pillows high and leaned against them, the can of beer in one hand, a cigarette in the other.

Just let the old lady come in now, she said. She'll see original sin. Drinking and smoking. Bet her daughter never carried on like this. Scrambled eggs with Vitamin A. Whole wheat toast with Vitamin B. And hot chocolate. Dearie, me, Mrs. Cabbage Patch would say. What are the young people coming to nowadays?

It was over a year ago, Margaret first visited Dr. Benjamin Baker. "I saw your name in the directory," she said. "I wanted to talk to you. I've been very nervous lately, almost hysterical at times. Of course, I know most people now have some kind of nervous disorder. Ulcers, spastic stomachs, migraines. But not me. I've always been a level-headed individual. No crying spells. No tranquilizers. Just a drink now and then. But now, little things disturb me."

"Why do small things upset you, Margaret," he asked. "Tell me about some of the situations. What were you doing? What were you thinking?"

"That's just it. It happens on routine days, in the same places I go everyday, with the same people. I mean, I don't get upset in strange places with people I don't know."

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"As if I'm going to be sick. Nausea, I guess."

"Have you ever really been sick? When you feel this way, do you actually ever become physically ill?"

"No. Never. I mean, I just feel that if I stay there in the place I'm in that I will be sick. I'll throw up all over the place. So I look for the nearest exit or rest room and if the feeling gets too bad, I just leave."

"And you never are sick? Even when you leave?"

"No, I just feel that way."

"Why don't you just stay there, wherever you are? Give it a try."

"I couldn't. I have to leave."

"Is there any particular thing you think about at these

times? Any one thing you can remember?"

"I only think: I've got to get out of here before I get sick."

"When did you first have this anxiety attack, Margaret?"

"I don't know. Some time ago. Years ago, perhaps. Sometimes I go for a long time and I'm all right. Then sometimes it happens every week, several times."

"Are there always people present?"

She nodded.

"What kind of people?" he continued.

She laughed. "There is only one kind of people. They don't come in kinds."

"I meant, who are these people?"

"I've told you. Just people. People I know. People I work with. People I live with. People."

She could never describe the people. He waited, but she never told him about Don or any of the others.

One time at Dr. Baker's office she said: "My mother died and I didn't cry."

"How did your mother's death affect you?" he asked.

"I tried to cry, but I couldn't. I loved her. I was sorry that she died, but I didn't cry. I was very efficient. I arranged all the details. I met all the people who came and I talked to them. They said I should have been resting, that it really was hard on me being the only child and having my only relative die. I wanted to cry for them to show them I was distressed, but I couldn't."

"Were you and your mother close?" he asked.

"I was the only child," she answered.

"That doesn't answer my question. Did you and your mother get along? Did you agree? Was she strict? How do you think of her now?"

"I did some horrifying things when I was growing up," she said. "At least, I think I did. Sometimes when I try to think about my life, I'm not sure what I really did and what I've only read or dreamed about."

"All children do peculiar things when they're young," Dr. Baker said. "Children have no knowledge of adult behavior. Children act differently because they are not confined to adult rules. What did your mother say about these things?"

"I was very close to my mother," Margaret said. "But there were some things I didn't tell her. I don't think I want to talk about this anymore. If I talk about this, really try to remember, I'll know whether they were true or not. And I don't want to know now. Anyway, it's not the problem. Going back to my childhood does not help me today. These anxiety attacks you call them, they happen now. I didn't have them when my mother was here."

The visits to Dr. Baker ended abruptly. She thought she had told him enough. She did not want to tell him anything else. She called him one day several months after that first visit. I'm not coming back to see you. You can't help me, she said. I talk and talk. I've told you when I feel sick. But you haven't given me any answers. I'm not coming back. You're one of them, so how could I expect you to help me.

"Dearie, are you home yet?" she heard Mrs. Carter call from the hallway. She held her breath.

"Dearie," Mrs. Carter said. "There's a good late show on television, and I'd be glad to have you come down to my room and watch it with me. I'll fix some nice hot chocolate, too. It'll do you good. It's not nice to stay in that stuffy room all the time. A young girl like you ought to be out more."

Margaret put the empty beer can under the bed, crushed the cigarette in the ashtray.

"Dearie," Mrs. Carter called again. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes. I'm coming," Margaret answered. "I just have to put on my robe and I'll be there in a minute."

"I'll leave the hall light on," Mrs. Carter said, as she shuffled away. "When you come out, snap it off, please."

Margaret quickly brushed her teeth, then slipped on her terrycloth robe, knotting the belt loosely around her waist. She slid her feet back into the shoes. In the hallway, she turned off the light, before she entered Mrs. Carter's room. A small lamp shaped like a sea-shell on top of the television set was the only light in the room. Mrs. Carter sat before the flickering picture.

"The late show is just beginning," she said. "Come sit over here, on the floor in front of me and I'll massage your shoulders with some nice liniment while we watch the movie. My daughter always enjoyed having her back rubbed. It was a Saturday night affair at our house before she left."



PEN SKETCH  
LEALAN NUNN

# Before Twilight

by DIANE OLIVER  
UNC-G

The car turned down the dark road, plowing between rows of ripening cotton, stopping in a small cleared off place and scattering ashes between the cotton bolls. The motor sputtered and the ashes settled, covering the green Chevrolet with hazy gray particles that almost were invisible in the night air.

"We'll see you tomorrow, Jenny," Hank said, turning to the girl sitting in the corner of the back seat. He waited until the tall thin girl slammed shut the car door and was climbing the porch steps to the unpainted frame house. Then the car started off, lighting a path in the middle of the dirt road.

Jenny opened the screen and was knocking at the door before she remembered. "Hank," she hollered running to the edge of the porch. "Hey Hank!" But the car continued chugging along the road. From the porch she could see the tail lights flickering in the darkness. As she stood near the porch beam, the light escaping from the living room window shone on two paper-back pamphlets. Jenny held them so the glow outlined the words on the cover—*Freedom Now, Americans All*. Suddenly she turned the title of the two books inside, facing each other. Feeling around in her dress pocket for the door key, she looked for a safe place to deposit the pamphlets.

Not that Mama would care, she reasoned, but still there was no sense in taking chances. Mama's brother Harold had gone around telling everybody that membership in CORE was dangerous in this part of the country. He almost threw a fit when she even mentioned the word.

She was about to turn the key in the lock when she heard footsteps approaching the front door. She started to tuck the papers in the crevice behind the geraniums, but before she could move the window box, the door opened.

"What kept you so long, honey?" The tightly curled hair of the woman speaking glistened under the living room light.

"Nothing Mama, I went over to Willie Mae's house," Jenny said, shutting the door behind her.

"All the way back from Willie's at this time of night? Jenny, when you going to learn not to be walking by yourself after dark?" As her mother frowned, she watched the wrinkles deepen into dark brown folds.

"Hank had the car and he brought me home." She tried to edge her way toward the curtained entrance that led to her room.

"He give you those books?" her mother asked. Impulsively she reached for the top pamphlet in her daughter's hand. Before Jenny could stop her, she was turning the pages of the first book.

"Oh," the woman said. "Oh." Jenny noticed that her face looked almost chubby in the living room light. She watched the shadow from her fingers as they slid across the printed letters on the jacket front. Her lips moved but no words came out. Congress of Racial Equality—She whispered the words again and looked up at Jenny.

"We're not trying to start up a chapter," Jenny said. Her words barely were audible. But before she could finish, her mother interrupted.

"Your uncle told you better," she said, sitting down on a folding chair. The bulk of her body seemed to overshadow the bent sofa and other chair in the room. Jenny looked down at her mother's hands seeing the knuckles swollen in the middle of each finger. She knew what she was thinking about. The father of one of her friends had found the charred body last spring. Since then she guessed everybody had just stopped talking about voting.

"When I heard you talking about that group I figured you'd show at least a little sense, but you're not going to be hurting yourself because of them. Especially on account of that Hank. Seems like he'd know better by now."

Jenny looked past her mother who had stood up again, at the place on the wall where the flowered wall paper was peeling. "But Mama," she whispered, "nobody said anything about starting trouble."

"Jenny honey," her mother's voice was sad, "this is Spring Gap. Remember? Alabama is paying for your tuition and without that scholarship you couldn't put one foot in a college nowhere."

"But Mama, if I lose the scholarship I could work some to make up." She looked at her mother waiting.

"No, there's no sense in going out your way to tempt trouble." Her voice became harsh. "You'll start working in somebody's kitchen and want to get married, and then the babies'll start coming. You'll be just sitting here like me." For a moment her mother stopped talking as if she were engulfed by the shadows that fell on the unfinished floor. Then suddenly she was looking at her daughter again. "No, Jenny, as long as you're living here, you'll listen to me."

The two women stood under the light bulb facing each other. Jenny knew her mother was frightened because in her world of pots and pans and narrow back doors nobody but a crazy person went around even talking about CORE. Finally the woman turned away from her daughter and walked into the kitchen. Jenny stood motionless, watching the shadow disappear behind the kitchen door. Then she dropped the two pamphlets on the sofa and quietly opened the screen door.

She wished she had thought to get a sweater, the air felt unusually cool for August. But almost all of her clothes were washed and ironed and ready to be packed for school. Mama probably would have a fit if she wore one of those washed and ironed sweaters before September tenth. She stepped around the pile where the ashes were dumped from the kitchen stove, thinking of poor Hank who always managed to drive right into the dust pile. Funny, she thought, how things never seemed to come out right. She had enough scholarship money to cover a whole year at State, and she even had a watch, but here she was into something again.

Jenny folded her arms and hugged her shoulders to get warm. The school told her she was deficient in algebra, but Willie Mae said that if she got arrested she could study math in jail. In spite of herself she smiled. She and her friends had thought about sitting-in for two weeks now, ever since Hank came back from Birmingham talking about the CORE meeting he went to.

She began walking toward Bubble's sandbox. In the dark, the sand seemed almost luminous, like the pamphlets under the light. She always had the whitest sandpile in the neighborhood because her father used to bring home the fine grained sand from the construction company where he worked. She stood over the rectangular box, looking at the toys Bubbles had left in the sand. Here and there along the edges of the box were wobbly letters, mostly "B's." Bubbles was learning to write her name, but she didn't have very much time to help the little girl.

Just standing there looking at the sandpile she realized how much she still missed her father. He used to help her make the hard letter, like the "S's." Seemed like he'd been dead much longer than six years. Now she and Bubbles played the same game with the alphabet letters. Sometimes when she was thinking by herself, she wondered how her mother could forgive them for not sending the ambulance right away and then carrying him right past the big hospital to reach the one that would take him.

With her right foot, she moved Bubbles' rubber spade around in the sand. She wondered if he would understand how she felt now. Hank said they couldn't depend on anybody else to do things for them. She knew he was right but being right didn't take away the fear inside her. Her father used to tell her that someday she would be proud to have been raised in Alabama. Already she knew better. Jenny sat down on the edge of the sandbox, running the dry sand through her fingers.

She couldn't blame her mother. Having to take care of Baxter, Bubbles, and herself was kind of hard on her. But since Baxter had gone to the army, she hadn't even had time to miss him. Today she hadn't even been home long enough to see if there was a letter from him.

She stood up and began walking toward the front door at a slower pace than usual. She wished her mother liked Hank better, but she thought anybody who got expelled from school was terrible. She tried explaining that the fight wasn't his fault. Everybody knew he couldn't just stand there while that boy from Linwood called his sister a tramp. Well, she guessed she should be glad her mother liked Bobbie, although she wasn't about to tell her who punched a hole in Mr. Wright's tire last Easter. Poor Mr. Wright still talked about how parking an empty car wasn't safe on her side of town.

Jenny realized that she was tired of standing up. After working all summer, she decided that cleaning for Mrs. Wright was an all day job. By the time she'd caught a ride home and cooked supper for herself and Bubbles, she usually just climbed into bed. She wished now she had stayed home tonight. She could have spent a peaceful evening reading the new book Mrs. Wright lent her.

Sitting down on the bottom porch step she thought about Hank trying to talk them into sitting-in. Everybody started kidding him asking if he was Martin Luther King or something, but he kept insisting he was violent. Which was funny then, but sometimes when she was thinking, she wondered whether he was serious. Hank always could take kidding, but none of his friends, not even her, would tease him too long.

Still, there weren't too many kids her age left in Spring Gap. Almost as many kids as nails in the step she was sitting on right now. Some of their friends had gone up North to work, but most of her girl friends were married and the ones she played with in elementary school had babies now. She ran her fingers over the five nail heads in the step. Out of the seven kids left, four were going downtown tomorrow and try to get served at the Rose Crest Tea Room.

She'd often heard Mrs. Wright say that the Rose Crest Tea Room was the only place in town where she didn't

mind eating out. She and Mr. Wright left the kids with Jenny and had dinner there all the time. All at once she chuckled aloud. Hah! She could see Mrs. Wright's face if she plopped down beside her in the great Rose Crest Tea Room.

"Pardon me," she would say, haughtily taking a seat, "but would you pass the menu." Mrs. Wright's eyes probably would bug out completely when she ordered chicken à la king. Why the poor lady more than likely would turn redder than she already was.

Suddenly she realized her finger hurt from rubbing the wooden steps. She had never been arrested before. Once her civics class paid a visit to the county courthouse, but that was in the ninth grade. The jail looked so shabby then she was afraid to walk down the rickety steps to the cells in the basement. Jenny was thinking about the roaches people said were in the jail when her shoulders straightened up. Somebody was calling her. She ran to the porch and quietly locked the front door behind her.

By the time she reached her room, she heard an angry voice talking in the kitchen. "Bubbles have you washed up yet?" She knew then that Mama wasn't calling her. "But Mama," a small voice answered, "I don't got no more soap." Bubbles and Mama were fighting the soapsuds. Honestly, she'd never seen a child that hated to wash so much. She remembered the time when Bubbles had liked to wash her own self. While Mama was out of the kitchen the little girl dumped a half a box of Rinso Blue into the tub of water and dived in. Poor Bubbles peeled for weeks.

Following the sound of voices, Jenny heard herself agreeing to put Bubbles to bed, and in twenty minutes the house was quiet. She wandered from room to room, just thinking. Finally she picked up a *Time* from last December, turned a few pages, and decided to undress for bed, taking the magazine with her to read herself to sleep.

As the bright sunlight shone in her face, Jenny decided that morning came too early. While Bubbles slept contentedly on the other half of the bed, she squirmed beneath the sheet. She turned over toward the door and heard her mother piddling around in the kitchen. She heard her starched housecoat swish to the door.

"Want your breakfast now?" To her ears the voice sounded tired.

"Uh uh, not now Mama," she yawned, "I don't have to be at work until ten today. I'll eat later."

Jenny felt vaguely uneasy. She was glad Mama couldn't see her face because she could always tell when one of them was lying. She turned over and buried her head under the pillow until she was certain her mama had gone to work.

She got up then, scorched the bacon, and fried Bubbles an egg. While she was cooking she tried to decide what to wear downtown. She remembered that Mrs. Wright always wore a hat when she went out for lunch but her Sunday hat was packed already and she couldn't risk getting the straw dirty. Jenny unwrapped her black leather pumps from the brown wrapping paper and slipped them on. She hoped nobody would notice she was barelegged. Finally, she decided to wear one of Bubbles' ribbons, then she wouldn't need a hat.

At ten-thirty she combed Bubbles' hair and put lots of peach jam on the bread so she wouldn't get too hungry before Mama came home. She knew Mrs. Johnson would give Bubbles something to eat if she stayed next door all day. She gave the child a peach to carry in her hand, a pat on the bottom, and shoed her next door.

The walk down the cotton road to the main highway took exactly three hundred and eighty-two steps. She timed herself once when she had nothing more important to

think about. Today her feet kept dragging as if they were stuck to the red dirt. She stopped to examine a cotton plant, pulling gently at the white stuffing between the brown dry leaves. This was the funniest kind of weather they were having, still cool enough for a sweater. She walked to the end of the field and waited for Hank and the car.

Willie Mae and Bobbie were already in the back seat when Hank drove up. He decided that parking on the colored side of town would be better than parking on the main street, in case anything happened. Then nobody would bother his father's car. So they parked by the Baptist church and walked in pairs the half mile to town. Jenny wondered if the others were as nervous as she. Hank and Jimmy were walking in front; she and Willie Mae followed a few paces behind; sort of like an army formation.

She was looking around at the fields she'd seen a hundred times before when she happened to notice that Bobbie's hip pocket was bulging very oddly. She watched intently as he unwrapped a caramel, popped the candy into his mouth, and dropped the wrapper on the ground. As they walked, he continued unpeeling caramels, making her almost laugh aloud. Bobbie, whose mother had seen to it that he grew up on manners, didn't even realize he hadn't offered anyone any candy. Jenny felt much better.

As they walked across the countryside, Jenny remembered that she loved this time of year. The cotton was spilling out of the bolls and some people had started storing in their hay for feed. They waved to Mrs. Nelson who tried to find out where they were going as she cooled tomato-filled mason jars on her porch railing. Jenny looked again at the mound on Bobbie's pocket which had become flatter and flatter. Suddenly she was tempted to say something, he had just reached back and no candy was left. She held in her laughter but in a few minutes the chuckles had turned into a strange fizz that invaded her body.

They were nearing the downtown section. Hank and Bobbie turned down Lee Street, past the Methodist Church, and the mudhole where she had dropped her library books in the sixth grade. The book she hadn't found probably was still down there. They came to the fire hydrant with the peeling paint and all of their initials carved on the surface. After seeing this same street for seventeen years she imagined she could walk the route with her eyes closed. Like they used to do when she was small and she and Willie Mae took turns leading each other down the road. But this time as they walked, she tried to see everything so she always could remember the street, just in case.

The group was downtown now and her heart quickened at the possibility of just stopping at the street marker and turning around. But she kept walking mechanically, up the hill, past their town park with the graceful weeping willows, until they arrived at the rock monument honoring the confederate dead.

"All right everybody," Hank was talking. "We're almost here now. You girls powder up and we'll be ready." Jenny looked down and discovered she was wearing only one glove. Quickly she put on the other one. Then she pulled out a handkerchief and wiped the dust from her shoes. Willie Mae fluffed out her hair and they were ready to leave.

Salerns were on special at Knox Drug Store. The girls stretched out on the long green grass made her aware of how hot she was inside. They passed the drug store and stopped at the "Don't Walk" sign. Nobody paid them any attention. For some reason she was glad of that. They passed window after window of bright smiling girls standing up to their ears in raccoon and boy-coats. She

thought of something to tell Bubbles—the mannequins looked just like the mouse people in her story book.

Seven more steps and they were directly in front of Seller's Department Store. The boys held open the door and on their right were the stairs. As they climbed to the first landing, the red carpeted steps became a blur of faded color. She heard Hank say something to Bobbie and his voice sounded too loud. She wondered if her nose was shiny, pushed a strand of hair out of her face, and stumbled on the last step. They were on the third floor. There right in front of her eyes was the tea room. The music coming from the hi-fi speakers near the door was just as soft and tinkly as she had remembered.

Hank looked for a side table, and they followed him in the dining room. Some of the people stopped eating, looked hard, and quickly left. Most of the other diners who had not yet looked up went right on with their meals. Hank pulled out her chair; Bobbie helped Willie Mae; and they all sat down.

A waitress swinging a handful of menus came halfway up to their table, stared at them, and almost ran through the kitchen door. She reached up to hasten the closing of the swinging door, but not before Jenny saw a tall hefty man follow the waitress who stood at the crack between the door and the wall pointing in their direction. The man nodded and walked to their table.

Hank spoke first and very quickly. "We'd like four Shopper's Specials," he said.

"You must be mistaken," the man interrupted, "your snackbar is downstairs. Now if you will kindly leave . . ."

"We would like the Shopper's Specials," Hank insisted.

"I'm sorry but we have no facilities for your people up here." The man smiled again. "Now if you will please leave, someone will escort you downstairs. We will be glad to serve you in the basement."

No one moved. The man disappeared through the same swinging door. Jenny sat across from Hank running her fingers through the pink squares on the checked tablecloth. While the man was gone, Jenny looked around. The tea room was nice she decided. All of the lights were soft pink and cast a hazy glow on the tablecloth. She thought even brussel sprouts would taste good in a place like this. She turned to look at the people in front of her, patting their faces with the pale pink napkins and leaving their plates half-finished. They watched the people leave the dining room, in little groups, sometimes alone. Once a woman brushed against their table, Jenny was sure she bumped them purposely. In a matter of minutes the Rose Crest Tea Room was empty of white customers. The rosy light continued to glow but there were nothing but quiet tables and vacant chairs to bask in the warmth.

While they sat there Hank tried to say something funny. "Maybe we should have brought our own lunch," he said seriously. They all laughed nervously. The Shopper's Special never came; still they sat in the tea room, the fourth table from the rear.

Two policemen entered the room. Jenny could see them without turning around, standing by the door. One was tall and fat and the other man looked like an ordinary white man, kind of colorless leaning against the pink wall. In her mind she immediately named him Rose Petal. She watched the fat policeman bend down and whisper to Petal who snapped to attention beside the door. Then the other man walked over to their table.

"Which one of y'all is in charge here?" Jenny noticed that his badge needed polishing.

"No one is in charge officer," Hank said. "We came to eat lunch."

"Well, get your gang together, boy, and let's go down to the office."

They were no trouble—he asked them to leave so the girls stood up and Hank and Bobbie slipped all four chairs in place.

The policemen escorted them from the dining room to the stairs. No one was left in the tea room to watch the procession. But with the appearance of the policemen, a small crowd had formed on the third floor near the banister. Jenny turned around and faced the stairs; she hoped nobody she knew saw her. Not that she was ashamed but she wanted to tell her mother herself. Her hearing all of a sudden from one of the neighbors would be horrible.

Jenny barely could hear the whispers in the crowd. Once she heard somebody yell something about a "coon." From the corner of her eye she could see a teenage boy who was about her own age. As they walked down the steps something hard, probably a spitball hit her on the back. She heard "nigger" and the word did not disturb her, but when she looked down at her fingers she had bitten the top off her thumbnail.

When they reached the street floor, the officer marched them down the main aisle, past the perfume counter where Bubbles liked to be taken every Saturday morning just to smell. As the officer led them past the department store she almost stopped from habit to drop a penny in Blind Markie's tambourine, but she was pushed past the jewelry store, then Sears. The blades of the electric fan outside Meyer's Hardware Store looked like spun silver and tracing the arc made her head ache. They stopped walking and a few feet ahead was the county courthouse.

This time of day the afternoon sun shone directly over the courthouse increasing the glare on the asphalt shingled roof. She wondered for a minute if the tar on the roof was as sticky as the tar on the main downtown street. Jenny glanced down at her brightly polished shoes, she was glad they didn't have to cross the street. She had heard the colorless policeman call the other one Johnson. And Johnson was the one who opened the side door to the police office and shoved them inside.

The room was neat and to her practiced eye clean. Even the sand in the metal ashtrays was a dull gravis brown. She looked at the blue wall, watching the sun light filter through the venetian blinds, making deep shadowy slats on the gray linoleum floor. She saw only one policeman on duty who barely looked up as the four of them walked in.

"Afternoon Captain Waymer," Johnson said. Waymer put down the *Sports Illustrated* and swiveled his chair to the front of the desk. "What you got here," he said looking at them with the same sullen expression Jenny had seen on the boy's face at the store. The policeman sat them down on the row of folding chairs near the window. There was one chair left over and she placed her handbag there.

Before the officer in charge could ask any questions the telephone rang. Jenny guessed it was the Seller's manager because the captain said he would call back if a signature was needed. The four of them took turns answering questions, but with each answer they gave, one of the three policemen managed to twist their words. After an hour Jenny just stopped talking and then they started yelling at her. When Bobbie tried to explain that she was tired they started hollering at him too.

Then the pale policeman started calling them names, each one, especially Willie Mae who he said was a turnip nose. Jenny tried to blot out the sound of his voice and began concentrating on the tile covering the floor, but

the flecks and the lines seemed to merge and she had to grasp the bottom of the chair to keep from toppling over.

Jenny watched Hank reach into his pocket, from habit she guessed, and pull out a cigarette. He had just lit the match when Johnson reached over and pulled it from his mouth. Without saying a word he took Hank's hand with the lighted cigarette and slowly ground his fingers into the ashtray. No one dared give Hank a tissue and he refused to wipe his hands on his good suit.

Then Waymer started back again: "Who put you kids up to this?"

"Nobody," Hank answered, pausing to make noticeable his omission of "sir."

"Well, let's go somewhere where you can decide." As he spoke he reached into a desk drawer, pulled out handcuffs, and snapped them on, one by one. Another officer grabbed Hank and Bobbie by the shoulders. Jenny and Willie Mae were just pushed in line behind them, down a flight of stairs into dark musty air. She thought of that story her English teacher read once, all about the underworld and the goddess who changed the seasons. Her legs felt not exactly trembly, but the way she used to feel when she was little and had done something wrong she would be spanked for. She breathed deeply and made up her mind to turn around and see everything at once. In the darkness, Jenny saw that only a part of the basement had been turned into cells, but there were enough cubicles for each one of them to be alone.

She was the last one to be guided to her cell which was farthest away from the single half window. Although her eyes had grown accustomed to the dark light, her ears still could not pick out any noises in the cell. She stood by the bars waiting for the officer's footsteps to disappear up the steps to the main floor, above her head. For an instant she tried to imagine the policemen trying to balance themselves on top of her head. Then she began counting silently to herself, trying to let ten minutes pass before she spoke.

When she was certain the policeman was gone she called softly to Hank. Even then Jenny didn't know why she called except that she wanted to hear Hank's voice. But before she could ask him anything the footsteps returned. "Cut out the noise," the voice said. He came closer and she could make out his hand on his hip. Jenny realized he had been standing at the top of the steps waiting for one of them to speak.

The officer turned to leave again, but since she could not be sure he was gone, she said nothing. The stillness in the jail was beginning to bother her. She waited to hear some kind of outside noise, music, the paperboy, or even just the sound of people walking up town. She wished she could think of something to keep her mind busy, to keep herself from wondering what the Seller's man was going to do.

Once when she was younger and had gotten angry at the neighbor girl across the road, her father had tried to get her back in good spirits by playing the wish game, which he said was much better than starting up a fuss. "When I grow up," she'd said, "I'm going to be an axe and cut off all of Maggie's hair." Her father had laughed and said good little girls didn't grow up to be axes. She wondered if he would think good little girls went to jail.

Jenny was thinking of other games she used to play when she became aware of footsteps. She saw Johnson standing in the door. "Captain says he wants to talk to you boys alone." His words came out slowly as if he was grinning between each syllable. Swinging the keys, he opened Hank and Bobbie's cells and led them up the steps. Jenny's knees seemed to sink beneath her and she slipped to the edge of the cot. In a few minutes she could hear footsteps shuffling back and forth. Then there was a

terrible scraping sound as if something was being dragged over the floor. She knew the walls were too thin.

Jenny heard the dragging sound for what seemed like hours. She kept wondering what time it was and wished her mother had let her wear her graduation watch before she went off to school. She sat farther back on the cot until she remembered about the bed bugs. Gingerly she stood and began examining her skirt, but the handcuffs kept getting in the way and she wanted to sit down.

She must have sat in the cell for hours wondering what Willie Mae was thinking about. Her fingers made a rhythmical tapping sound to the tune echoing in her head. The kids at the meeting Hank told about sang freedom songs, but she didn't know the words to any of the new songs except the major one. "We shall overcome, we shall overcome," the words followed the thud her fingers made on the mattress. She used to hum the song sometimes while she worked. And Mrs. Wright asked her if all Negroes sang under their breath. Only the word hadn't come out Negro, she imagined it was closer to nigger.

Jenny thought about college and wondered if any of the other freshmen would have jail records. Nobody in her family had ever been arrested before. Except that cousin on Mama's side and he didn't count because he was really a step-cousin. The picture of the new dormitory on the college bulletin flashed into her mind. And then she wondered if she would be there to enroll.

She held her breath and listened closely. In the darkly lighted basement, she could hear distinctly the sound of breathing in the cell at the other end of the room. She hoped Willie Mae's head didn't ache like hers. The dull throbbing pain became intensive and she realized her head wasn't the only part of her that ached. She wanted to go to sleep, but her body felt brittle, like she would break into a hundred pieces if touched. Jenny didn't know how long they sat in the hot dusty basement, but when she heard steps coming down the stairs, the sky had darkened and the hotness had settled into an uncomfortable warmth.



WOODCUT  
MARIAN BUCHANNAN

Taking his time, Johnson unlocked Willie Mae's cell and then hers. He herded them together, up the steps toward the main room. Immediately she saw Hank; his eye was puffy and there were bruises on his cheek. Bobbie was sitting beside him, his head slightly bent so she could see the cut above his eyebrow. She traced with her eyes the imaginary line where blood had dripped from his forehead, down on his torn shirt. She felt sick all over again, even when Hank reached over and touched her arm. He started to whisper something to her, then both of them saw the little black man who had just walked into the office, standing by the door.

"Good evening, children," he said. "The officer tells me you children are a little confused. I told him you all weren't doing nothing but playing games."

Jenny didn't move at all. They had agreed not to tell anybody their plans. She couldn't imagine what Reverend Honeycutt was doing in their office, he was the last person in whom they would have confided.

"How come you children not working your jobs?" he asked. "You know you colored children need to work to keep out of mischief. Ain't that right now?"

She watched the preacher smile up at them as if he was sharing a big joke. Reverend Honeycutt was what her mama would call a bad taste in the mouth. Jenny was determined not to listen. Preacher or no preacher she knew God would forgive her this time.

They sat in the office for fifteen minutes watching the minister. He had conferred with the Seller's man and the policemen he said. And they all agreed that to press charges would start up publicity, which neither they nor you children wanted. Reverend Honeycutt did not look at any of them as he spoke, his eyes were straight ahead on the blank wall.

As the preacher paused for breath, Captain Waymer began talking. Jenny watched the red veins in his neck ripple in and out of his shirt. Ashamed—ashamed—his words came out in puffs—they should be ashamed of trying to start up trouble. Jenny focused on a crack in the ceiling, she did not look down until the captain stopped talking. Then he glanced at the clock on his desk, took off the handcuffs, and pointed to the door. "Next time," he said, not having to finish his sentence.

Reverend Honeycutt softly closed the door behind him and they were out in the twilight. Nobody said anything to him but he tried to speak. "Children," he kept mumbling, "children, I know what you're thinking . . ." but Hank and Bobbie pulled Jenny and Willie Mae away and they left the old man standing in front of the newsstand next to the courthouse.

They went the backway, across some cotton fields, to the place where Hank had parked the car. The walk did not seem nearly as long as before. While they walked between the cotton plants, Jenny felt the wind rustling on her back, but none of the plants around her moved. Then she looked down at the chill bumps on her arm. By that time they were in front of the car. Willie Mae lived closest to town, then Hank dropped Bobbie at his house, and she was alone with him.

"They say the first time's always the hardest," he said looking straight ahead. She nodded her head which could

mean yes or no and looked out of the window. Last night this same road had looked so different to her eyes. In the twilight she saw that there was no place for anyone to hide. As they rode, she sat in the front seat thinking about the funny way the dark covered everything when suddenly she almost cried out—the next time, Oh God, the next time. Suddenly all the feeling she had held in during the afternoon spilled out. Jenny tried to stop the first tears but in seconds she was crying and her whole body was caught up in the sobs.

"Hey, do you feel all right? They didn't bother you and Willie Mae did they?" Hank slowed the car and pulled over to the side of the road. At first he fumbled in his pocket for a clean handkerchief but then he turned toward the window until she was ready to drive again. In a few minutes she opened her handbag and pulled out a soft tissue.

"I'm okay," she whispered, "I was just thinking."

He gave the signal to turn down her road when she reached over and pulled on the steering wheel. "That's all right, I can walk up to the house." As if he understood, Hank stopped the car.

"Want me to wait until you get to the porch?," he asked.

"No," she tried to smile, "thanks anyway."

She stood by the last cotton row waiting until Hank's car blended into the dust, way up the highway. Her mama, she knew, probably would not be coming home until later, on Thursday she always had to stay because of the bridge club meeting. Even this far from the house she could see Bubbles sitting on the front porch steps.

Jenny looked at the open country around her. The air was dry and as she lifted her head, she seemed to be overshadowed by the sky. She was out doors at one of her favorite times of the day, after the sun had set, but still not late enough for the darkness to invade all of the day light. She looked around her at the cotton plants that were heavier and more listless than they had seemed this morning. She stooped and touched the dry red soil that had been plowed and weeded so carefully. She imagined they would have rain soon, September always came with rain.

Jenny tossed the clump of dirt she had picked up back into the field and started down the road. She saw Bubbles jump from the porch to the ground and then the little girl was running to meet her.

"Jenny," she yelled, running at full speed, "how come you just now getting home?" She stopped running long enough to make a jump for Jenny's knees.

"Stop Silly Billy Bubbles, you'll get my dress dirty!" They were both laughing as Jenny tried to salvage a white glove that had slipped to the ground.

"Silly yourself," the little girl said still giggling. "I didn't like Aunt Johnson's dinner so I come home. Know something?" she said, turning her eyes upward. "I bet I been waiting for you a billion hours."

"A billion hours I bet," Jenny said echoing her words. Pushing Bubbles in front of her, she walked around the ashes pile and toward the front door, thinking of what to fix for supper and how to explain to Mama.

## 21ST WRITING FORUM PANEL

**ROBERT LOWELL** is a Pulitzer Prize winning poet who now teaches at Harvard. Among Mr. Lowell's books are *Land of Unlikeness*, *Lord Weary's Castle*, *The Mills of the Kavanaughs*, and *Life Studies*, and he has a new volume of poems in preparation.

**ELIZABETH HARDWICK**, Mrs. Robert Lowell, is Advisory Editor of the *New York Book Review*. She has written *Ghostly Lover*, *Simple Truth*, *A View of My Own: Essays in Literature and Society*, and she edited *William James' Selected Letters*.

**FRED CHAPPELL** recently published a novel, *It Is Time, Lord*, and has also published poems and scholarly articles. He teaches at Duke and is working on a new book of fiction.

**RANDALL JARRELL**, writer in residence at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, is author of many books of poetry, two collections of essays, and a novel. Mr. Jarrell won the National Book Award for *The Woman at the Washington Zoo*. His translation of Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* will appear this Spring on the New York stage, and a new book of his poems will be published in September. He is working now on his translation of *Faust*.

**PETER TAYLOR**, novelist and story writer, is also in residence at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. His new book, *Miss Leonora When Last Seen and Other Stories*, will be published this month. Mr. Taylor's other works include *A Long Fourth and Other Stories*, *A Woman of Means*, *The Widows of Thornton* and *Tennessee Day in St. Louis*.

**CAROL JOHNSON'S** first book of poems, *Figure For Scamander*, will be published this Spring. Her poems and criticism have been published widely, and she is preparing a new critical study, *Strategies of Reason*. Miss Johnson recently returned from studies in England and is teaching at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

**ROBERT WATSON**, Associate Professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, has written *A Paper Horse*, a volume of poems, and *A Plot in the Palace*, a play which will appear this Spring. Mr. Watson has a new volume of poems and a novel in progress.

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

## TWENTY-FIRST ANNUAL WRITING FORUM

March 17, 18, 19, 1964

**Weatherspoon Gallery, McIver Building**

*Tuesday, March 17*

- 2:00 p.m. Carol Johnson—Poetry Reading
- 4:00 p.m. Peter Taylor—Fiction Reading
- 8:00 p.m. Elizabeth Hardwick—Lecture, "Plot In Fiction"

*Wednesday, March 18*

- 11:00 a.m. Fred Chappell—Fiction Reading
- 12:30 p.m. Luncheon (Elliott Hall)
- 2:00 p.m. *Coraddi Panel:* Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Hardwick, Fred Chappell, and resident writers discuss student writing in the 1964 *Arts Forum Coraddi*.
- 8:30 p.m. "The Taming of the Shrew" National Players (Aycock Auditorium)

*Thursday, March 19*

- 2:00 p.m. Robert Watson—Reading New Poems
- 4:00 p.m. Randall Jarrell—Poetry Reading
- 8:00 p.m. Robert Lowell—Poetry Reading and Commentary



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